DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 840 PS 020 503

TITLE For Student Success: 'Reach Out and Touch'--Schools, Families, and Communities.
INSTITUTION Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, Mass.
PUB DATE 25 Oct 91
NOTE 56p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Black Child Development Institute, Inc. (St. Louis, MO, October 23-25, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; *Early Intervention; *Home Visits; Infants; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Special Needs Students; Toddlers; Workshops; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *Missouri (Ferguson); Missouri (Florissant); *Missouri (Saint Louis)

ABSTRACT

This document is a transcript of a workshop intended to inform conference participants about the experiences of two schools, both members of the League of Schools Reaching Out, which sponsored the workshop. First, the director of the early education program for the Ferguson Florissant (Missouri) school district spoke about her program, which is committed to supporting parent involvement, identifying children with special needs, and providing special education services. The speech focused on home visits, the principal manner in which the school district works with parents. In addition, a parent spoke about her positive response to the program. The audience questioned both speakers. The second school highlighted was the Wilkinson Early Childhood Center, a magnet school in St. Louis. The principal talked about his program of parent involvement, which includes the traditional parent-teacher organization, and a school-based management board in which parents participate. After the principal's talk, a parent and a teacher described their responses to the program, and all the speakers responded to questions from the audience. (BC)

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Enclosed is the transcript of the Laegue of Schools Reaching Out workshop held at the National Black Child Development Institute, Inc. (NBCDI) 1991 Annual Conference. The conference was held on Friday, October 25 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The conference theme:
"VISIONS: An Agenda for African American Children"

League of Schools Reaching Out presentation:
"For Student Success: 'Reach Out and Touch' -- Schools, Families, and Communities"

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MRS. WILLIAMS: And these schools share the underlying conviction that all children can learn, those who are under-served can succeed academically and socially. But it takes a whole community to educate a child, and they're demonstrating this very well through this project.

Mrs. Johnson has had extensive experience. I think she just joined this project in April. But prior to that time, she was coordinator for Middle School Improvement for the Association of Junior Leagues International, and she had served as executive director of the Washington Parent Group Fund. And that is sponsored by the Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights in Washington. She also has been a special education teacher in Maryland and Michigan. While living in Maryland, she served on boards for fair housing, housing for the elderly, criminal justice, and education. And she was active in a number of international groups. She holds a BA in psychology, an MA in special education from the University of Michigan, and a JD degree -- I can hear -- I'm talking too loud. I'm sorry. Okay. And a JD degree from the Antioch Law School in Washington. I knew I should have used my voice. Now it's my privilege in one second to turn this over to Etta Green-Johnson.

I'd just like to remind all of you of one thing

before you leave here today. Please fill out the evaluation forms and leave them with the young lady at the desk. And now Mrs. Johnson will introduce you to our other panelists.

MRS. JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Mrs. Williams. It is a pleasure to make this presentation today. We are delighted to be here at this convention and to share with you some of the experiences of two of the schools who are part of the League of Schools Reaching Out. As was said before, this is a league of schools that reach out to families and communities all grounded in the notion, first, that all children can learn, and that it takes a whole village to raise a child. And by integrating all kinds of efforts within the school with the participation of community partners, as well as families, we believe that these schools are well on their way to significant reforms and major outcomes for their students in terms of increased achievement and social and academic success.

I am not going to go on and speak more. There is a handout that describes the League in more detail. It is funded through major foundation funding. The program in Ferguson and Florissant has been a beneficiary of some funds that we have been able to secure for them for a specific reaching out program, and other schools in the League are also beneficiaries of such special funding.

However, today, I want you to get a better idea of what reaching out means by listening to the people who are

here with me at the table. I will just introduce them. From the Ferguson and Florissant school district, the early education program, is Marion Wilson and a parent, Michelle Moore. Next to me is Sheila Morris who is a collaborative partner from Maryville College with Wilkinson Early Childhood Center which is in St. Louis. And on my right is Tom Stenger, principal of the Wilkinson Early Childhood Center; Tammy Baker, a teacher at the Wilkinson Center; and Francine Page, a parent at the Wilkinson Center. And I am going to ask Marion Wilson and Michelle Moore to start by talking because theirs is the first program certainly among the League. They start with birth, as I understand. And she will share with you some of their reaching out experiences at their center.

AUDIENCE: I would just like to have some idea of what the demographics are of the programs that you're working with.

MRS. JOHNSON: They will tell you.

AUDIENCE: Okay, fine.

MS. WILSON: A principal -- if you can't hear me, raise your hand -- a principal from Norfolk, Virginia called me the other day. I had no -- I never met the person. And he said, "Why do you believe so strongly in home visits?" And I -- my immediate response was, "In thinking of Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's book we're world's apart, the schools and the home. And secondly," I said, "we need to value and

support what is going on in the home."

Now we represent a school district in the St. Louis area in which we have middle class to very low income parents. We have people -- many people work at McDonnell Douglas which is one of the major businesses here in the St. Louis area. In our early -- in our school district, we're running fifty-four percent white, forty-six black Americans. Our early education programs, when they first -- we have a variety of programs, but we're committed to two things: one, involvement of parents; two, special education services and identification of children with needs. Now, I am going to focus primarily on the major way in which we work with parents and that is through home visits, although we do a lot of other things.

Worlds apart. There is something very, very important in going into a home and saying, "I am on your turf. You don't have to be on my turf." I don't know how you feel, but when I go into a school I know I bring some of the baggage that I've had from my early days in an elementary school. We all do. And so it's important to go into the home because there you are be -- you are establishing some mutual respect for each other. We are doing home visits beginning at birth and going up to entrance into kindergarten. Our children who are four years old are receiving weekly home visits and also coming to school once a week. Our children from birth to three are receiving at

least six home teaching visits during the year plus other kinds of experiences.

We need to realize that there is a curriculum that the home offers that is very, very important. I firmly believe that we learn most from the people we love. And those are our -- those are the people in our home. And there is a curriculum in the home of values, of conversation, of value of books and other things which the school needs to build on. I would like to present to you some of the assumptions that we work -- that we believe in as we work with parents. And then one of our parents is going to describe her experiences as a parent of a two -- well, a nearly two-year old.

First of all, we must believe that all families need support -- all. We fragment our programs too often for this person who needs some help versus another person. All families need support in the kinds of society that we live in today because families do not have as much as they need. We also assume that parents -- all parents want to be good parents. And as we work with young children from birth up until school age, we have to look at that child in terms of the environment in which he lives and we have to consider all the needs that this child has, and that whatever one parent values may not be what somebody else values but is important to that family and we need to build on that. Third, if we support families in a mutual understanding, we help parents

cope with living today rather than becoming dependent upon the system in which we live. We need to free people to be very independent. Fourth, information on child development, both formal and informal, assists family in child rearing roles. The family is a part of the community and, therefore, we also need to link ourselves with community resources and I will talk about that in a little bit. Five, support in the first years serves a very preventive function. Working with parents, and one of the things that we want to do with parents, is support them and say, "You are doing a good job in parenting." It's important that they have a feeling of success in what they're doing. And parents will be involved in programs if they see some sense to the program. With some of our youngest children we do a lot of play -- we do a lot of play and we're encouraging language development and parents can actually see the progress of their children. And parents and families will really understand what we do when we're very specific in our -- and they can see a direct application.

Yesterday we were in a home visit and Michelle asked the parent educator, "What should I be getting for Christmas for my little -- my little fellow?" And there was just a real good discussion back and forth of that topic.

There will be success when both the goals and values and the school are very compatible. An important ingredient is that the parent educator, whoever is working in the home,

has the respect and understanding of that parent. And it's like giving individual attention to the parent. It's giving individual attention to the child. But in -- and it's a mutual give and take, back and forth kind of thing that's very important. You know, we believe that young children learn in a pingpong effect. And that's sort of the same way we are doing when we are engaging children and families in home visits.

Now, people who work with children in the home in a sense have kind of a lonely position because they're working on their own. They need support, too. And often times they go into homes when issues in the home are -- there are some issues that are far more important to the parent than the things that the parent educator has in mind. So what we do is that we have a support system for our staff and we also have a support system for parents. For example, recently a parent -- a teacher was saying to this parent, "It's so very hard. I don't know what's going on in the home." And then the parent finally said, "I'm really worried about some other member in the family," and we were able to get some help. So what we do is provide psychological services and social work services for families, and then on the basis of that may refer them to other outside community resources.

I want to turn the program over now to Michelle who is going to talk to you a little bit about what it means to have a parent educator coming into her home. And we will do

that right now. Michelle Moore.

MS. MOORE: I've been in the program -- can everyone hear me? You can't? I've been in the program for a year-and-a-half now. My son is twenty-two months old. We entered the program when he was three months old. We would have began when he was first at birth, but he was a premature baby so he was in the hospital for six weeks. And with him being a premature baby, the program has really helped me because it's helped me -- I've had a lot of frustrations because he was born three months early. He was two pounds at birth. And he was anticipated to have a lot of developmental problems. But I guess with the grace from God he doesn't have any at all.

His development is somewhat slower than a twenty-two month old baby, but I think with the help of the program, of Parents as Teachers, they have helped me push him along to where he needs to be. It's not a demand -- a real pushing type of program, but they show me areas where he should be at. They've reassured me with his gestation age of -- backing it up three months that he's right on target. They've brought in physical therapists for me, for my son. His balance was off at about fifteen months old and they gave me some tips and guidelines to go by to help him with his balance. And he's just come right along. And I anticipate by the time he's two-and-a-half that he will be caught up to exactly where he should be. And I can honestly credit it to

the program because I had no idea of what to expect from -- I'm a first time parent. I had no idea -- I don't know what children should be doing at what age, what they shouldn't be doing, what to look for, you know, where there may be a weakness or a strong point and they have helped me with that. They bring literature into the -- when they come on their home visits. And they let me know where he should be, what's going on next, what to look for. And I think with, you know, being a parent, this is part of my responsibility because if there is going to be a problem or if he's going to be weak in one area, if we can catch it at a young age before he enters school, then we can overcome it and then he's going to be better ready to learn once he enters kindergarten. And that's what I've gotten out of the program and I know I am going to benefit even more from the program.

AUDIENCE: Are you at home full-time?

MS. MOORE: No, I'm not. I'm a single parent. I work full-time. I'm starting back to school in January. So it really has been a good support system also. They have -- we network with other parents. We go to different meetings. We go to play time with the children, things like that, and sit down and talk to another parent because, you know, sometimes I'm pulling my hair out and I'm like, you know, am I here by myself? But to talk to them, I know that I'm not out here by myself and it really helps. You come away and you're like, "Okay, I can go on now."

AUDIENCE: I'm interested in the kind of scheduling because we need some parenting program and I work and just trying to find the right time, especially when you have mostly working parents.

MS. MOORE: That's right. And like I said, I am a working parent. Luckily, with -- I have a really good situation. I am a property manager. I manage an apartment complex. My sitter is right there on the complex. I have not put him in day care. I do not want to do that until he's about three-and-a-half years old. So I set the appointment up on my lunch hour. That's how I work. And so I just come home. I go get Austin. On my lunch hour we come over and we have our home visit and then I'm back at work within an hour.

MS. WILSON: We work on Saturdays, any dates. We have a flexible schedule, the parent educators.

AUDIENCE: But really kind of limited in terms of --

MS. WILSON: Because of the working parent.

MRS. JOHNSON: Do you have anything else?

MS. MOORE: No, that's it. Like I said, I just -- I really can't say enough about the program. It is the parents' number one responsibility to educate their child. The teachers, they're number two. We have to be the -- the stepping stone and then we help the teachers in the school system to educate the children and it has to begin at birth. I don't think that you need to step into your child's life when they are in high school and say, "Okay, now it's time

for me to get involved." No, you need to start at day one.

MS. WILSON: Thank you, Michelle.

AUDIENCE: I'm not sure who can answer this question.

MS. WILSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: But I was wondering what type of target population do you work with? Are you working with middle class or poverty stricken people, or what type of target area of population do you actually deal with and how can the low income families be a part of this type of program that you serve to the public?

MS. WILSON: We make a point of -- first of all, it's open to anyone who would want to enter, but we also work on getting parents who may not have heard about us by putting flyers door to door in certain areas. Really working with the health department in getting teen mothers involved in the program, too. And so we have a wide variety of families. Yes?

AUDIENCE: My question is, are you going into these homes with a (inaudible) that need to be adjusted or need to be corrected or do you go into the homes to get a better understanding --

MS. WILSON: We are going into the home with child development information. We are helping parents observe their children. We are helping build interaction skills between parent and child. But we are in no way going in to say you are doing a good job or you are doing a bad job. No.

This is a mutual kind of understanding and support.

AUDIENCE: So how do you educate the parent that doesn't know as far as --

MS. WILSON: Showing them what their children can do. Showing them. This is very important, to show what a little child can do.

AUDIENCE: Do you have any idea percentage-wise of, you know, from the middle class to the low income what kind of breakdown it would be that you are reaching?

MS. WILSON: Well, in our zero to three program, we are reaching about thirty -- we only get funding for thirty percent from the state. So we are working about thirty -- we think about thirty-five percent of the families.

AUDIENCE: Okay, but in that, what would the breakdown be?

MS. WILSON: In the breakdown of that thirty-five percent?

AUDIENCE: Yes, between the low income and the middle class?

MS. WILSON: I would say that it would be a third would be low. But you see, I think the factors within the home setting are so important. The curriculum in the home is more important than --

AUDIENCE: Yes, I am not going to argue. I was just wondering what you were reaching.

MS. WILSON: And with our four year olds, it would be

a higher percentage of lower (inaudible).

MRS. JOHNSON: Thank you. We better move on with the other panelists and then we will leave sufficient time for other additional questions. Thank you very much.

I would like to introduce Tom Stenger from the Wilkinson Early Childhood Center.

MR. STENGER: Thank you. I'll give you a little information based upon some of the questions you've asked. We're a magnet school in the city of St. Louis. Our city district's population is between forty to forty-five thousand students, roughly seventy to seventy-five percent minority student population. The staff of the school system approximates that. We are in our second year of operation as a school. We are under a court decree as part of a desegregation program. Our school population by law has to be fifty/fifty. Of the two hundred and seventy-five youngsters in our school, presently eighty percent of them quality for free or reduced price lunch. We serve three -- children from three years of age through second grade. We are using the state's new early childhood curriculum and we are a professional practice school for the Maryville College.

One of the core or crucial issues that we chose to confront as a school is parent involvement. And to that end, we have done a variety of things that we will share with you this morning. The handouts that were in the back of the room, just to give you a rough idea of what they were, the

little green book is an effort to communicate with parents about the district-wide students' rights and responsibilities. It is a discipline code and it outlines due process and all of the issues that are related thereto. We have a copy of a parent survey we use to identify issues to help us develop our parent involvement program. There are two pages from our annual report that refer specifically to parent participation and volunteerism, and it also refers to a school report card that we sent out our first year and we plan to send out our second year to get feedback from our parents as to what our program has been doing and their perceptions of that program. There is a copy of the parent report card with the date that it was received back. One of the problems we have dealing with little people is getting communications home. We are going to make a bigger effort this year to get a bigger response to our report card. There is also a two-pager about an extended day program that parents let us know they were interested in and we've tried to respond to that. There's a green brochure about the school and our philosophy. There's a copy of our last month's school newsletter which one of the parent groups is responsible for working with us to get out. And then there is a copy of a commercially prepared parent magazine that we pay a fee for to get permission to print for our parents because we've found a great deal of continuity between the issues it addresses and some of the issues we're trying to

address as a school.

Now, our basic approach to working with parents has been a twofold attempt. We've developed the traditional parent teacher organization, sort of a booster group. And we've also developed a school-based management or mini-school board type of group because we felt that one way you get commitment from parents is to give them a sense of ownership. If you are going to give them a sense of ownership, you have to give them a piece of the action. So we're in our second year of working with both of those groups.

We've developed a parent room in the building and committed a room to the exclusive use of parents. Parents have helped us outfit that and prepare that. And we are moving along with that in year two. We should have our extended day program going by the second semester. We've reached out and incorporated the "Y" in that program. In response to parental concerns about wanting to participate because we draw kids from the whole metropolitan area and our kids are not in the area immediately around our school, but some of them ride forty-five minutes to an hour to get to our school. Sixty of them come from the county school districts. The remainder come from the city itself and come from as far north as the river to as far south as the river. So in response to parents who didn't have cars and who wanted to participate, we orchestrated permission for them to get on the bus with their children in the morning and ride to

school. They can stay with their children at school, go on field trips, participate, and get on the bus and go home with them. In response to parental input, we committed fourteen hundred dollars to parent involvement programs, specifically to encourage parents, and five hundred dollars of which we've committed to cabs because some people don't have transportation.

We've involved parents in the selection of staff, both teacher assistants and teachers. And one of our parents here today will tell you about that experience. She was one of those who helped us pick teachers. They've helped in developing school activities, a traditional thing like school pictures and Santa coming and all of that. But then they've also helped us go out to the community people and get agencies and companies and businesses to assist us and help us. They fostered our first fundraising project and we will be delivering the product tomorrow. And our part of the profit will be five thousand dollars for the school, and that's all done with parental input.

The parents also asked for, and we responded to programs like you see on the board back there where you have a parent night and we had a science night. Forty-eight kids got involved in -- or forty-eight science projects came about as part of our curriculum last year, which is more science projects than I've ever had in five previous schools I've been a principal at. And it is reflective of our efforts in

terms of parent involvement. But they expressed some unease about dealing with science. So we had a hands on science night where the parents came with their kids and we did some science stuff with them. And there were some people there to talk to them about how do you go about doing a science fair.

We've done the same thing with the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing. We broke up in small groups and gave the parents a chance to interact with teacher and their children to actually see how that goes. We are planning a math and computer night where the parents will come and work in our computer lab and see how we deal with that with children. But then we are also going to foster some work with the computer for parents who are interested in doing that.

So, we are not satisfied with where we're at, but we've made a major move. We have a strong sense of commitment to parent involvement. The job cannot be done and the problems we're solving and facing as a society cannot be addressed unless the parent and home work together. And to that end, we have tried to realize that we have a product to sell, ourselves. We have a service to sell. And any good salesman knows that you can't do that without analyzing the needs of the customer. So we're trying to do that and we're trying to respond to our customers' needs.

The sad reality is that you go buy a car and you get an owner's manual. When you go to the hospital and get your

kid, you don't. So we're all flying by the seat of our pants when we enter the business of being a parent. And schools have as much to learn about that as the parents do. And we're trying to develop an environment in our school where we're a community of learners. So we've invited our parents in and we're starting to step out. We buy into the Parents as Teachers Program. I'm trying to cajole my system to house one of the programs in my building. Because of the nature of our program it would be an ideal mix. I am trying to get a freeze lifted so I can get the kindergarten intervention program in my school. I think that the issues that we're addressing today are the crucial issues of our day. And I think you're all on the right target doing what we're doing, and that is trying to find some answers and to solve some problems. Thank you. And I did it in five minutes.

MS. WILSON: I'm proud of you.

MS. BAKER: Because families have such different needs, we as teachers must employ different strategies in our efforts to involve as many families as possible. And before you choose a strategy, consider the needs and characteristics of the families that are represented in your classrooms. And I would like to share with you some of the strategies that we at Wilkinson are using to reach out and touch the families involved in our school.

The most important factor has been our open door policy. We invite the parents to visit the school before

they enroll their child. This allows the parents to gain firsthand knowledge about our curriculum and how the curriculum is implemented. The door remains open throughout the year welcoming parents to volunteer for field trips, participate in party planning, tutor children, read to children, and share their family traditions and customs. Volunteering in schools builds the parents knowledge of child development and appropriate learning experiences.

Before the start of school, each parent and child receives a picture of their teacher along with an introductory letter. And on the first day of school, we have a lot of students that are walking around carrying their pictures trying to find the face to go with it. We send a monthly newsletter home which shares events of the classroom with the parents and also includes activity pages for the family to do to extend classroom concepts and skills. And some of the articles are written by the students and printed in their actual handwriting.

AUDIENCE: They're done by a class?

MS. BAKER: Yes, they're done by classes.

MR. STENGER: But we put them all together in one book.

MS. BAKER: There are some samples of the newsletters in the back on the tables.

AUDIENCE: They're all gone.

MS. BAKER: They're all gone. Okay.

MR. STENGER: Sorry.

MS. BAKER: We also have parent bulletin boards that are displayed for those parents who have the opportunity to visit the school on a regular basis. And the information included are some of the daily schedules, field trips, the menus, and parent resources. And as Tom had mentioned, we offer educational workshops. And we had one that was offered on behaviors and discipline which was presented by a psychologist because parents expressed an interest in that topic.

We have parent/child field days in which parents volunteer to set up and run the booth. And each choose the type of activity. So that involvement makes it a little bit more fun. We have parent-teacher appreciation lunches where everyone brings a dish. And we're camera crazy at Wilkinson School, snapshots everywhere. Parents enjoy seeing the photos taken of their children while involved in the daily activities. And we also take photos to make greeting cards for holidays, Christmas, Easter. And we use portfolio assessment, which is a showcase of our students' work, and it focuses on the growth over time and it provides a basis for discussion between the learner, the teacher, and the parent. And it's evidence of the achievement and successes that each child gains.

And our success has been due to the support from our school personnel. And we also build a foundation of needs,

concerns, and interests of the parents by asking them what they want. We provide a variety of activities, not just lectures. And we view the parents as change agents. The parents can make the change in the child, the home, and the environment. And most important, we have respect for our parents. And there's a sense of common shared concern working for it, because once parents fill that existence they're freer to work with you, the teacher, on the child's behalf.

MS. WILSON: Thank you.

MS. PAGE: Hi. First of all, I'm very happy to be sitting here before you. I have three little boys. I doubt that I'll need a microphone to talk to you.

Being a parent at Wilkinson, when my kids entered there, my oldest little boy started there last year. And when he started preschool there -- no, kindergarten there last year -- it seemed as though I started all of my education over again, too. Now, I have a degree in special education. I am with special school district and I have done with seventeen years. And I also have a masters in administration. But it's something about when your own kids are in school you walk in there almost empty headed. And that's what happened to me. Plus, I'm a very authoritarian type parent, which all the literature is saying that's probably not the best way to go. But coming from a very traditional and Catholic background, that's all I know. But

when I stepped into Wilkinson, they really have employed that decision making process.

The kids are involved constantly with making the decisions. No decision is just simply imparted on them and then they simply follow it, which is the same welcome that the parents have. I can go in there any time. Then they ask, you know, what are some things you'd like to see Edward doing or Jesse doing and they absolutely try to employ some of those things that you do suggest.

Everything that they've described here, it is not just pretty words and things that they've written down to send out. They actually do do these things. They have Vietnamese kids there, black students are there, the white students are there. Some students are a little better off than others economically. But they all feel very, very good about themselves when they leave that school.

My second little boy stays in time out almost every day. He goes to time out. And I thought I really was the time out expert because I'm special ed. And I found out that I wasn't even doing time out cause I mean when I put him time out he can stay there maybe a half day. But they do time out for five minutes and they let him know, you know, this is what you did. Can you tell us why you're in time out? Can you tell us some other decisions you possibly could have made? And then he's out. And he would not miss a day at Wilkinson so that he does not feel like he's isolated. He

doesn't feel like he's bad. It's just simply the behavior that we probably need to redo or do differently. And he's happy.

My oldest boy walked around for a long time with his head down, very shy, very withdrawn. And he doesn't do that anymore because even though the little things he may think of, probably to me would seem silly, they don't make it -- they don't make him feel like that there. Anything that's on his mind they address. Anything that's on my mind as a parent they address.

The teachers are very kind. At any time you see them without being rehearsed hugging the kids, shouting at the kid if that's needed, you know, whatever it's needed and it's very genuine. It's a very hard working staff and they really make a big effort to employ all of the concerns that the parents may have.

MR. STENGER: It's only costing me a hundred dollars for her speech.

MS. PAGE: I am just very, very happy that my kids are there. I just have another one who is sixteen weeks and I don't even know if they'll be in existence when he's ready to go. But I would love for Patrick to go there also because they have more questions than they do the answers. And to me that makes me know they're thinking and they're trying to do something with the kids of the '90s because there are very, very few answers.

I have a BD classroom myself. And when I leave there every day I have no idea as to what I've done and I don't get the parent involvement because now the kids are sixteen and seventeen. The parents are frustrated. They are burned out. They have not been successful. The kids have not been successful. So, no, they don't want to come to the IP. They don't want to come to the PTOs because they are so used to the negative. But if they could have started perhaps in a program similar to this one where they got more positive stroking, you know, that, no, you are not making the mistakes, you are not the problem, you know, we've got to do this thing as a team, then perhaps the kid may not have been as burned out and would not be in my classroom, and certainly the parent would probably not be as frustrated and saddened by the education that's simply not working for many of our students. It's unfortunate that we are bombarded with that, but I think the task of educating them is certainly going to take involvement from the parents and this school does an excellent job at meeting that need.

MR. STENGER: Etta reminded me of something I should have stated that's helped me in my approach to working with parent involvement, is after being criticized as a thirty year employee of the school district, as often employees are by not having your own children in the school system where you work, I have three of my grandchildren in this school. And I actively solicited their participation from my

children. And that has helped me as a principal of the school in a lot of ways.

MS. MORRIS: I'm bringing the other piece to the puzzle. When the magnet school was originally developed, the judge, in his wisdom I think, suggested that it should be a collaborative effort between a community institution and the district and the county districts as well. And so when we were planning this curriculum, it was really a collaborative process. I have been very fortunate in being able to be a part of that process coming out of higher education.

The kinds of things that I see going on in the school that I feel are really important and that I feel good about is the amount of community involvement that generally you see in there. There are any number of corporations and companies within the city of St. Louis and St. Louis county who have contributed goods and products and various things to some of the events that have been going on at the school. The school, in turn, has supported and participated in a number of different community events as well. There was a Math-a-thon that was held by one of the community organizations and the children participated as a part of that.

There have been two corporations in particular that have given support to the whole process of the magnet school. One is the Danforth Foundation who provided funds for us to explore ways in which we could broaden parent involvement. Maryville went to the Danforth Foundation and requested the

funds which then have provided not only the background for what is knew, what is innovative, where people are coming from -- not only that information but also references for parents as well.

Tom talked about the parent room. And part of what we would like to do with the parent room is to provide all kinds of different reference materials for parents so that if they have a particular concern that they have materials there that they can explore with. The other is the Monsanto Fund from Monsanto Company. Monsanto has given a grant to Maryville and the school district to provide consulting services from higher education. Another woman and I -- the other woman being a math or a science consultant -- go into the school and spend one day a week at the school along with preparing materials prior to doing that.

Tom referred to it as a professional development school. These are something that are on the cutting edge in education now because the belief is that teachers coming out of institutions, young, novice teachers, much have information that is current. They must be able to deal with parent involvement. And those of you who are old enough to be parents know that these young kids coming out really are very fearful of the parents. So what we do is take our students into the magnet school and actually train our students there. Their instructors come in. We conduct joint research with the school and there are a number of other

activities. It also provides opportunity for us to provide in-service training that meets the needs of the teachers and the parents so that Marty and I will develop, for instance, the summer during the training session for the whole staff we did some presentations on parent involvement and were involved in the ongoing process.

Also, I serve on the school-based management advisory committees so that the community is also involved at that level. We have also talked this year about including other community agents so that we will go out into the community which we serve and try to bring those individuals onto the board so that we're providing services that really meet the needs of the community from which we're drawing.

MRS. JOHNSON: Thank you. I think we can entertain your questions. I can give you more information about the League of Schools Reaching Out from myself. But I just want to find out if there are any other people here in the participants group from any of our League of Schools Reaching Out, any others other than the two here at the table with me. You may -- some of you may not even know that, but you can check the list that is a part of the handout which was at the back. There are sixty-eight schools in that League and I did have information that at least one of them was aware of our presentation today and would be joining us.

MRS. WILLIAMS: For those of you who didn't get one, there are extra copies of the League handout here at the

front.

MRS. JOHNSON: Now your questions. Yes.

AUDIENCE: The school teacher. I think the principal mentioned that you were a part of a process whereby the staff selected teachers or the parents selected teachers. Could you describe that please?

MS. BAKER: The teacher sits -- one teacher from each grade level will sit in on interview sessions to interview candidates if there is an opening in that particular grade level. So we are part of it. We get to see the person to see if they'll fit in with our working team.

AUDIENCE: So you recommend to him -- you know, she may or may not.

MS. BAKER: Right. We put in our input and we state why.

AUDIENCE: How many men do you have on the staff?

MS. BAKER: We have one.

MS. MORRIS: And he was hard to get.

MR. STENGER: And he's an ex-member of the Eagles football team.

MS. MORRIS: He's wonderfully gentle. He's tall as can be, but wonderfully gentle with the kids.

MR. STENGER: We have a team. Sheila sits on a team. I sit on a team. I have an instructional coordinator who sits on a team. A teacher sits on a team and a parent sits on a team. And we have a rating scale. We have -- we

developed questions prior to the selection process. We interview all of the candidates and then we sit down as a group and do a consensus process to pick the person we want to hire. And that's how -- we didn't start that way, the first people, Sheila and I and some other person from the college, but then we got into that and said, "Hey, if what we're really going to be about as a school is what we're saying," then we brought the teachers in. And when we pick a teacher, we also have an aide involved, a teacher assistant. And when we pick the assistant, then the teacher who is going to work with that assistant is involved.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: I have a couple of questions. One has to do with your portfolio assessment. Did you work -- who did you work with to put that design together, because this is something that there's a lot of talk about but it's not so easy to get a handle on in terms of how to actually get it put in place.

MR. STENGER: Well, Sheila took the lead in helping us with that in getting all of the information that was out there. That's one of the neat things about having a university as part of your team. You know, you've got to really -- you are empowered by that.

AUDIENCE: Right.

MR. STENGER: So then she brought the stuff to us and then we sat down as a team and started talking about -- and

one of the things we've added to it, this year we're going to start video taping the three year olds. And then as they move along, that will build in their portfolio. And then we thought as far as a parent involvement "item," I think there's a lot of PR. Not only is there a lot of stuff about evaluation which is a crucial issue, but when you turn the portfolio over to the parent at the end of the road --

AUDIENCE: Right. The whole history.

MR. STENGER: Yes. I think -- we hope to see a lot of positive stuff accrue out of that.

Another thing I would like to throw in Francine didn't mention in her presentation. When we started talking about this early childhood curriculum and evaluation, you don't do a lot of pencil and paper stuff. We still do the standardized test and some other testing. But by and large, it's observational and it's a different twist on the ball. Well, Francine, as she said, is very traditional and had a whole lot of problems, "Well, is my kid still going to get in Harvard when we are done with him?" And so as a result of her input, we've started a dialogue with Maryville's experts on tests and measurements and our own district's expert. And we're discussing. We've had five meetings now about the portfolio, about just assessment in general. And this came with the -- she wouldn't leave us alone about that. We just couldn't stop. So we've moved in that direction.

AUDIENCE: Is it possible to get some information on

your -- at least your -- where -- your starting point in terms of what you -- the document that you put together in terms of the presentation from the beginning to the go ahead?

MS. MORRIS: It was not a document per se that we eventually come up with. What we're doing is exploring different ways. Because the program that is in use at the magnet is what is referred to as a developmentally appropriate practice for young children, that assessment becomes very important. And --

AUDIENCE: The school goes as far -- from where to where?

MS. MORRIS: From age three through second grade. And it will never go any farther than that.

AUDIENCE: I have a second grader that I'm trying to do some assessments with.

MS. MORRIS: And what we're actually doing is working both with the State Department, with the Evaluation Division. And then part of what I said was that we can conduct joint collaborative research. And one of the things we're looking for is an alternative reading assessment. And so Maryville -- one of the faculty members from Maryville has prepared an outline of emerging literacy and some oral reading, guidelines for oral reading. And we went in -- we brought the students from Maryville in who did a number of the children in kindergarten and first grade. And now the teachers have been in-service by that same faculty person and

will conduct the rest of the assessments. And then based on -- we'll all get back together again and talk about what refinements we have to make.

I think the portfolio process is one where you have to devise and agree.

AUDIENCE: Yes, right.

MRS. JOHNSON: This gentleman?

AUDIENCE: How involved are your fathers in your program?

MR. STENGER: Yes, I think, for instance, at science night we had at least seventy-five parents present. Of that group, there was a strong representation with both parents. There -- the families -- our two parent families usually come together. Now, part of that you have to remember is unique to the age level we serve. You know, the newness of that role has not worn off. The burnout hasn't taken place. So that is one of the belief things that's emerged for us. We're going to get our licks in while the getting's good. And maybe we can help the schools to deal with -- and post second grade can maintain that. And I think that's a legitimate question. But, you know, if we had something that involves the kids, we can get a pretty decent turnout just because of that. And then if you -- now that we're dealing with cabs and that kind of thing, we even expect to do better because the big problem that you have, some of the parents who can't participate can't because of some very real

physical -- you know, when you live across town and at night. In St. Louis public service, the bus system is -- it just doesn't -- after six o'clock in the evening, forget about it. And then there aren't too many people who would like to wait for half an hour to forty-five minutes for the bus to get on to come to a meeting and then get on another bus to go back. So that's why we went that direction.

MRS. JOHNSON: Let me see if we have some answers on the father involvement. Hold on. Marion?

MS. WILSON: We have a lot of mothers who are working part-time so it means that sometimes we will go into home visits and the father will be there which is really neat. In our parent meetings we have a lot of fathers who will come. In our program for four year olds on Saturdays, a teacher has four to five parents helping her each Saturday. And we have a -- we keep it on Saturday because we have a good number of fathers who will participate. And that's really, really neat because they bring another dimension that the female does not have. And so we have those involved that way.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: My concern is that we are talking about assessing the very young child. And in terms of what assessment might have been used to evaluate the progress of young children, I'm a little concerned. And much of the research done by NEA I see documents (inaudible) multiple measures. So my question to you is what kinds of instruments

are used to assess these young children?

MRS. JOHNSON: We will start with the very young.

MS. WILSON: We are not doing any standardized assessment of children until the end of grade two. We do have to do some formalized assessment for special education of threes and fours. I have to say that. That's on an individual basis. We are going more and more toward process types of assessment and a lot of observation. I know that the 2000, you know, Education 2000 Committee in looking at assessment of young children looks at four dimensions: checklists, portfolios, parent observation, and teacher observation. And I think that's a good model to follow. Our problem is that for governmental reasons we have to give -- special education and so on, we have to give some standardized tests, unfortunately. We are going more towards some play therapy kinds of -- play assessment kinds of things and assessing social emotional development, language development. We are doing that with young children with toys. The child brings a toy and we use that for informal language assessment. We've got a lot to do in that, but it's a terribly interesting question.

Still related to the assessment question, we believe firmly in (1NAYC). That is the reason why we are trying to find some alternative assessments collectively with the district because currently the children take the Stanford Achievement Test which we really do not feel is appropriate

for the ages of the children with whom we deal, but it also does not test for those things we are hoping the children will gain from the program. And then I will let the rest -- but it is observation checklist.

MR. STENGER: I would just add, we are part of the big metropolitan school district, so part of our task is to educate some of the people we work for about the issues of assessment of young people. And that's what we're doing with our dialogues with the evaluation division.

MS. BAKER: In my assessments, I teach three and four year olds. I use a lot of post-it notes while I'm writing down actually what they're saying, what they're doing. Then we fit it into our guidelines of what we're looking for. So that's what I mean by assessment at this age.

MS. PAGE: Well, keeping with what you asked, that was my concern as a parent because the school is a very nontraditional type setting and they're incorporating things in a very nontraditional way, but then using a very, very traditional verbal type of an assessment and that was my concern. And, like you said, in saying that to them at most of the meetings I guess did something in order that they did move with that and they now -- and, you know, they realized it too and wanted something else. But with all the bureaucracy in using some of those same old tools, they were I guess somewhat made to use them but they are moving to try to assess them differently because I was not happy. My son

fell very low on that very traditional test, but yet his verbal skills had increased at such a rate that I could see it and they could too, but the test did not tap that at all. So they are trying to look into something else.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: I have two questions. And this is for the Wilkinson staff. Number one, what type of parent/teacher ratio do you have? I am talking about how many teachers per parent professional. Secondly, what type of exclusionary policy do you have, if you have any, and are you as selective with your students as you are with your teachers?

MR. STENGER: Our students are selected by parents applying and there's a lottery. We just so happen, because we serve three, four, young children, there's a great deal of interest in our school. So you go through a court monitored procedure through a division called Recruitment Counselling. If you as a parent want your child to come to our school, you apply. Your name, your child's name, is put into a computer selection process that randomly pulls your name out of the popper. Then the only thing that allows you to break with that is that once you get one child in the school there is a sibling preference for other children. So I as the principal have absolutely no control over who comes into my school building.

AUDIENCE: If I may interject here?

MR. STENGER: Go ahead.

AUDIENCE: The reason I asked the question, and you partially answered it, is because most of the time when you have a setting such as yours, you are going to have highly motivated parents putting their kids in there. You're not going to get the kids who are not motivated. You're not getting the crack babies or the kids who really have problems. Their parents aren't going to put an application in. That's (inaudible) problem. They're not going to put in an application. I'm not being negative, I'm just asking.

MR. STENGER: Okay.

AUDIENCE: That's why I asked the question.

MR. STENGER: I think on the surface you are on a correct -- you have identified a correct point. But what has happened after a ten year program of magnet schools, there is a higher order of interest that cuts across the socioeconomic lines for getting your children in the magnet schools. And we have motivated parents, black and white, who want their children in our school. But we also have black and white parents who are from dysfunctional families who still get their kids in our school. So we -- we're not an elitist school because we cover the waterfront.

I mean if you want to talk in detail, I can get into some -- we face -- I've taught for fifteen years, a principal in fifteen years in schools all across the city. And I still am dealing with some of the same problems in my "magnet school" that I was dealing with when I was in -- on a one

race school in the roughest and poorest part of town. So, you know, you don't -- you don't get away from it like one would think your question might indicate. You have a cross mix of people. But I do have some -- we do have some parents that are -- going after a magnet position does indicate some concern for education, or sometimes it's a concern for safety. In St. Louis because of the emerging gang problem and two hundred and seventy-six murders, there are people who think it's safer to put their child on a bus, to have the child bused to a school than have their child walk six blocks down the street to a school that may be within six blocks of their house. So that is a real issue. Now their concern is not educational. Their concern is safety, you know, because that is a very real issue in our community right now. And various broad based community groups are stepping forward to try to respond because St. Louis is getting a lot of national recognition as a violent place to raise children.

AUDIENCE: What is the ratio balance?

MR. STENGER: Racial?

AUDIENCE: Balance. Ratio balance.

MR. STENGER: Oh, the racial balance, like I say, we're a court magnet. It's fifty/fifty.

AUDIENCE: No, no, no.

AUDIENCE: Ratio.

AUDIENCE: Teachers.

MR. STENGER: Oh, okay. In the preschool class, it's

two adults per twenty children. Kindergarten through second grade, it's two adults to twenty-four children. Our model calls for a teacher assistant in every room. That's one of the advantages of being a magnet school.

MS. PAGE: He's very right in that when the parents opt to send a child somewhere they have bought into the system and they are certainly going to produce and participate, I think, at a higher rate and a higher frequency than that parent who simply has no choice and the child just simply goes to the neighborhood school. So you are indeed correct. The parents, for the most part, and I would think that does have something to do with the turnout at the various programs, because they chose, they did some paperwork and some leg work also in getting that kid's name on the lottery so that they do have a vested interest in that particular school because there aren't that many schools. I think there are only two that address kids that young in that curriculum.

MR. STENGER: Yes, we have a Montessori program in town.

MS. PAGE: I worked very hard and then they lost my kid's name in the lottery and it did -- it was a big worry and a headache and I got very nervous because from what I'm getting here it would cost at a private school big, big money. So that, yeah, you are exactly right.

MR. STENGER: But I'd also say to you in the

operation of any school it's always a good news/bad news situation. You know, it's good news. The bad news is my kids come from the metropolitan area. I have a major communication problem. I have transportation problems. You know, it's -- so it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. The bottom line issue is unless the school, I believe, takes a proactive stance in reaching out to the parent body, you are limiting your effectiveness. And it also is important for us in the school to recognize you cannot diminish the home. The home has a viable role in the education of young people.

You know, we talk about the parents as first teachers. That's real. The parents are another teacher to the child. And you can't -- as quite often happens with middle class people who run classrooms, I had a personal experience where it comes quite often you can be fed back that you're denigrating the child's home situation just because you have middle class values and your life experience has been different. Different doesn't mean better. Different means different. And your first lesson as a human being in trying to be an educator is to recognize that although that home situation may be different, it's not a question of better or worse or what. It's different. And I've not met a parent in the roughest places I've been at, in the most dysfunctional parent, who did not want good things for the child. And if you can tap into that somehow, that's

a crucial issue. That's the crucial issue.

AUDIENCE: (Inaudible.)

MRS. JOHNSON: I'm sorry, we didn't quite hear that.

AUDIENCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. STENGER: We interview the teacher assistants right from the word go. And we have -- we try to do a broad tapestry of folks. I have a grandmother as a teacher assistant whose raised nine children and is -- I guess she's about seventy years old and does beautiful things with the kids. I have a lady from Nigeria. I have a lady, an Hispanic lady. We have an ex-professional football player who is a teacher assistant who is male. We have tried to recognize a variety of issues in selection of talents and expertise for our school.

AUDIENCE: How do you prepare them?

MRS. JOHNSON: I'm sorry?

AUDIENCE: How are they prepared?

MR. STENGER: Prepared? Well, we -- part of our -- now this is -- this is a crucial kind of thing we've discovered. That's a marriage that's tough. You know, it's like two cooks in the kitchen. So the first year, as part of some summer training we did, we did Myers Briggs stuff and we talked a little bit about personality and work styles. And then we had everybody give us three choices and then Solomon sat down with these choices and did some paring. Well, then we got smarter because we had a couple of divorces, you know,

emerge. And it's as messy as the real ones when it gets in the classroom.

So what we've done now is we've added to that. You get to pick your partner. And then we have a committee working on the formalized I guess marriage counselling procedure that's going to go because we've got to get people to buy into that you see, because you don't have the freedom. Once you get the marriage going, you can't play checkers with people. You know, that's denigrating to them, but it also -- how can you break up a working relationship to solve two other people's problems. So we're not home free on that yet. We've still got some unresolved garbage with that.

We had one serious breakup last year. And then what we did, we had one terminal case. And so, you know, we've learned a little bit by that, from that. And we haven't learned it all yet because that's just an interesting dynamic, that working relationship. And when you think you're picking functioning, effectively functioning human beings, well you find out in some circumstances when they're different personality types that does not necessarily guarantee their success.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes.

MS. PAGE: (Inaudible) even with that, too. When you walk in that classroom, you really do not know who is the head teacher and who is the assistant. They're acting both as the ones in charge, are working very closely with the

students. You really don't know. There's that difference, that separation is not noted when you step in there.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: What happens to the older children?

MR. STENGER: Okay, that's life after Wilkinson. We had a meeting on that. That was the name of the meeting, "Life After Wilkinson." There are six designated magnet programs where there have been reserve positions for these children at third grade. There's two visual and performing art centers, there's an investigative learning center, there's a classical junior academy which is "gifted." I think I've covered the waterfront with types.

MS. MORRIS: Foreign language.

MR. STENGER: Foreign language. Okay, a foreign language school. What we've done is started letting our second grade teachers out to go visit these places to get a sense of the school climate so that as parent questions come up they can talk to parents in terms of what they know about their child. But we have said to our parents, as we say to them when they come into our school, "You wouldn't buy a car without driving it. Talk is cheap for a principal. I am not going to stand in my office and tell you what a rotten school I run. I am going to sell my school. So if you are smart, you will come into my school and spend some time. And I say spend a couple of hours, folks, because we all can't be on stage all the time. And so if you come into my -- now if you

want to talk to my teacher, you've got to make an appointment to come because while the cat's away, the mice are going to be mice. So we've got school to keep." So I say to parents, "You want to talk, come back on an appointment basis and the teachers will take time." But you can come in any time. My teachers are used to the Maryville folks coming in and anybody else that happens to come by. And they know they come in and sit down and watch. Sometimes you'll get put to work when you come in and the teacher will say, "Cut these letters out for me," or something.

MS. BAKER: Or the kids will.

MR. STENGER: Or the kids will come up and show you their stuff. But I say, I have a better chance of being -- making a happy marriage with you and my school, parent, if you come and see before you come. Because you can watch how the adults interact with the kids, you can see how the kids interact with each other, you can see how they go down the hall, you can go smell my restrooms. You can make some assessments about our place. And if you don't like what you see, you would be a fool to come. And I say up front, come. I mean see for yourself. And I figure if you're coming back, then you liked what you saw. We've got a chance with you then.

AUDIENCE: Would you say that your school is Montessori-based?

MR. STENGER: No, there's another early childhood

program in the city called Montessori. Ours has similarities to Montessori in that it's experiential-based, there's a heavy emphasis on cooperative learning, it's thematic in its --- but we're very big, as Ms. Baker wanted to remind me. We like to call ourselves constructivists. That is to say it's like the nine blind men and the elephant. Everybody experiences the elephant and walks away with their own description. And it's the teacher's job to make sure that you come around often enough that every blind man walks away finally with what an elephant's really all about.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE: I have a question about the Institute for Responsive Education. I see that in Maryland there are two schools that are involved, but they are both county schools. But yet I see Johns Hopkins is stated as one of the universities doing some research. How does one get involved, even on an information status, with this Institute?

MRS. JOHNSON: You call me. We have an application process. We are -- the Institute for Responsive Education receives grants from several major foundations, (Pew), John D. and Catherine T. McArthur, and Mott among the leaders in terms of dollars to expand the League of Schools Reaching Out. And in that process, since early spring we expanded from fifty to sixty-eight schools. Our next round of receiving application is underway and we will entertain applications to the League on the part of schools between now

and the beginning of the year. So if you --

AUDIENCE: (Inaudible?)

MRS. JOHNSON: Individual schools. You can -- you can apply for -- we do have an application on hand for three or five schools from Baltimore. If you are not among those or to find out whether you are, just call me at work and then I can tell you -- we can send you an application form.

AUDIENCE: But the problem is sometimes we're one of fourteen (inaudible) schools in the city in restructuring, a program that doesn't afford you anything unless you know -- you get out and do your own kind of walking. This is the first time we've even heard about this. Everything that we've been attempting to do in restructuring we are hearing here this morning, but we're doing it blindly on our own with no money. We have no aides. We have no money for -- we have nothing in the system, as you may know. So I need to talk.

MRS. JOHNSON: Yes. Joyce Epstein at Hopkins is co-director along with Don Davies who is -- Don Davies is president of the Institute for Responsive Education. The League of Schools Reaching Out is a major project program of the Institute for Responsive Education. Joyce Epstein, who is at John Hopkins as you know, and Don Davies are co-directors of a sister organization, a federally funded center on families, schools, communities, and children's learning. And we interact the two, both the League of Schools Reaching Out and the center along research lines. The researchers

from six different colleges and universities, Yale, Hopkins, Wheelock, Boston University which is where our offices are, University of Illinois at Urbana -- and I'm missing one but I think it's in the flyer -- all have research components of their work which are reportable to the federal government. Some of that research is related to activities and programs of Reaching Out in the schools in the League of Schools Reaching Out. So that is some way in which we overlap.

That also means that we can draw on center research to help support and provide resources and technical assistance to the members of the League of Schools Reaching Out. The League has only been able to provide financial support for Reaching Out activities in a small number of those sixty-eight schools. We are preparing now for a conference next week in which Marion Wilson and people from her program will join from fifteen schools, eight of whom -- of whom we have been able to provide direct funding through our grant money from the foundations, the remainder of which have other forms of financial support.

And the Reaching Out activities vary widely. Many of the things that have been discussed here are components of programs in those fifteen schools and other schools in the League. Many of them are part of reform efforts in other ways, under other names, but all of them share the bottom line conviction that all children can learn and that it takes a whole village to raise a child. And so they are cognizant

of and participating already in activities to reach out to families and communities and want to secure support in those efforts from the League.

MR. STENGER: One of the things that always troubles me about conferences and workshops like this is that quite often there is a perception that somebody is sitting up trying to be an expert. Well, first of all, I'm not fifty miles from home and I don't have my suitcase with me so I'm not an expert. What I've come to find out is that parent involvement is not something you do to parents; it's something you do with parents, and that it's a courtship. And the situation is here, I'm on the make. Okay? I know my parents aren't going to come to my office and beat my door down and tell me what they want me to do. So I have a stake in my school so then I have to go out and try to start things rolling. Once you start things rolling, a whole lot of stuff starts happening.

Quite often when you're at a meeting like this -- and inherent in the question, "Oh, you're a magnet school. Oh, you've got aides. Oh, you've got resources." We get, "Well, that won't work for me." Well, probably -- maybe not. But unless you at least take the proactive stance and start doing something, then your frustration grows, your isolation grows, your sense of not being in control grows. Whereas, if you start -- one of the things that's happened to us is we've started going out -- McDonald's hamburger stand near us

contacted me and invited me to Founder's Day. I went to Founder's Day and found out they would sign up my whole school for birthday club, that they would provide a whole lot of stuff for me that I could use to support attendance and academic achievement in terms of little coupons and all kinds. Had I not been out stirring up some dust, that opportunity wouldn't have come my way. So I think that's the thing you've got to take ownership for is that we are responsible for action.

What action, you have to say is -- when we found out about the League of Schools, we jumped at the chance to try to get a part of that because we're looking for answers. We're not here to give you them. We've told you about some of them we've found, but it's like any other learning process. We haven't told you about the twenty things that we've fallen flat on our face with and the dirt on the pants that I've taken off and buried. I mean you don't hear about that. You've only heard about the successes. And for every success we've had in the year-and-a-half we've been at it, I can say there's about six that I don't want to talk about.

MS. PAGE: They also really involve the neighborhood. They have very, very little of that disturbing graffiti marked on their buildings as opposed to some of the other schools. And that's because you still let them play basketball out there. So some of the youngsters in the neighborhood who want to play basketball and they don't

deface the property, they are allowed to do that. And then those guys take an interest in the building and kind of ward off some of the, you know, kids who may not be as structured and would do those things. So the homes around the school, he's made a point of involving them also so the school is kind of watched. There are just watch dogs around the school that he just did very diplomatically in allowing some of the kids to play on the property. I mean very simple things.

MR. STENGER: But although Sheila was told yesterday by one of our neighbors she couldn't park in front because she's supposed to park in back.

MS. WILSON: As we work with parents, I think it's a lot of hard leg work. We don't have the money that we need, but I think the personal satisfaction for the people who are involved is terrifically important not only for the parent but also for the person who is working with the parent. To be able to work with them on that basis in a mutual support way, manner, provides a lot of personal feeling that I am doing something for somebody else.

AUDIENCE: I have a question related to the teaching assistants. Who provides the training? What is the criteria for employment for the teaching assistants?

MR. STENGER: The teacher's assistants have to have sixty college credit hours as a minimum. As far as training goes, with Sheila's help we developed a two week training program each summer. We've done that for two summers. Part

-- one week is dealing with project construct, which is to talk about and give the recipe on how we format the delivery of the instructional activities. The other week we make school related in we deal with things like the personality issue and problem solving. And we involve the total staff in developing the school plan for the year, opening of the school routine. The idea of the pictures and the letters emerged from that process.

See, one of the problems we have running a public school is that the state and the city says what you can do with people for the six hour day. And the problem is if you're really going to work with people, you need time to make decisions. Well, we've been able to get time because I've got folks that stay after school, come in early, and spend time in the summer to help us make decisions because we've built the idea if you want a piece of the action -- if you want to tell me as the principal how to do things, then you've got to help me do them because nobody will -- you can't go up to anybody -- do you know anybody in your life that you can say, "This is what I want you to do," and then you turn around and sit down and they'll do it for you? I don't. I've never had that experience. So what we've developed is a situation is they can come and say, "This is what we've got to do," but then I'm looking for them to be there. And so that's where that comes from. And the training part of that was to help evolve that and provoke

that. And, Sheila, that's another empowering thing. Sheila would help me get some -- see, they sit me down a lot because they say I talk too much for some reason. So we get other people to come in and talk to all of us. And then I'm a participant like everybody else. Although we recognize there's some things the superintendent is going to hold me accountable for and I can give them a piece of the action but I can't give them the response -- you know, the ultimate accountability. So, sometimes you have to say, "Well, wait a minute. We've got to do this because the rules say that." But that's what we do in the training. We deal with that mindset, that climate. And she brought in a couple of people who know about Myers Briggs and all of that kind of thing.

MS. BAKER: And I think it's also extended in the classroom because I spend a lot of time with my assistant. She helps me plan my lesson plans. And we sit down and we talk about things and I ask her what did she like about it, what could we do different, and do you have any suggestions. So they're also putting in an input on a daily basis.

MS. MORRIS: We also input. This year we're trying the video taping of teachers and the assistants in the classroom. And then as a group we sit down and look at the tape, the people from Maryville, the instructional coordinator from the school, and the teaching team, and we talk about what do you see, what changes would you like to make so that they're moving along. We also offer monthly in-

service that's held after school on topics that have been generated by the teaching staff.

MR. STENGER: It also helps to have Sheila and Marty in my building one day a week all day. See, because they can function as the coach. And so as we try new things and you fall down, there's somebody who will come on and help you up and dust you off, "Come on, it wasn't so bad. Try it again, but next time try this." And it's helped remove me -- I've stepped out of some of the cycles because we had seven years as a school system with the superintendent saying teachers are evaluated on test scores. So a lot of that baggage is attributed to the principal title. So in some areas I have to step in a more indirect way instead of a direct way.

You know, that helps. If you can get a network with that kind of resource, I can't tell you how much difference that makes. It really does -- it really does make a big difference.

MRS. JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

MS. WILSON: Well, I think we've all learned what a tremendous resource parents and the community can be. And as another school principal, it lets parents find out that principals and teachers are human beings, too. And I know with the parent population that I deal with, I always tell them when they come to see me as principal, you know, I'm a parent first. I want for your children what I want for mine, and that's the world. And once I think we find out each of

us is human and break down those barriers that Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot talks about, then we are going to be successful in educating every child. And I know you will join with me in thanking this panel today for bringing all of this information to us. And please let them know and get feedback from you through your evaluations. If you would just be kind enough to leave them with the young lady as you walk out of the door, we would be deeply appreciative. Thank you very much and thank you to this panel.